The Builder.

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FOR a long time past the church of St. Benet Fink, in Threadneedle-street, has presented a ruinous appearance to the passers-by, in consequence of the removal of the tower that stood at the west end of the building at the time the site was cleared for the new Royal Exchange and adjacent improvements.

The present church of St. Benet, Fink, so called from one Robert Finck, or Finch, who built a previous church on the same site (destroyed by the fire of 1666), was completed by Sir Christopher Wren, in 1673, at the expense of 4,130*l*. The tower was square, surmounted by a cupola of four sides, with a small turret on the top, and had a large recessed doorway on the north side, of very good design.

The arrangement of the body of the church is very peculiar,—we may say unique, and although far from beautiful, affords a striking instance of Wren's wonderful skill. The plan of the church is a decagon, within which, six composite columns in the centre support six semi-circular vaults, that are carried upon architraves and cornices to the external walls, and inwardly are faced with archivolts: between these rises an oval cupola. The effect of the series of arched chapels, so to speak, around the central area is singular. Wren's power of arranging a plan to suit the site is shewn in numerous buildings, but in none more forcibly than in this small church.

The destruction of this building was threatened some time ago, and elicited many expressions of regret from the public,—so many, indeed, that we had hoped the intention was abandoned. We now learn with infinite regret that the work of demolition is to be commenced almost immediately, and that the interesting structure in question will be cleared away entirely.

The destruction of a church should never be permitted without the most cogent reasons, let its architecture be what it may; and, if on no other ground, we should therefore protest strongly against the contemplated *improvement*: when in addition, however, the building threatened is seen to be the work of one of the greatest architects England ever had, a peculiar example of his skill, sound and likely to continue so, if not interfered with, much longer than half the new houses around it,—we feel bound to express our dissent from the intention in the strongest terms, with the faint hope that it may induce some member of the Improvement Committee to bring the subject once more under consideration before it be too late. It will be very easy to take the building down, but very difficult to replace it. Public convenience must of course be studied, and if St. Benet's stood in the way, and absolutely prevented the improvement of the thoroughfare, we should grieve at its removal, but bow to the necessity. This, however, is not the case, and we shall be forced to cry, shame on those who may be concerned in the wanton destruction of this valuable example of our great countryman's skill.

We refer our readers to a valuable and novel table for calculating the strength of cast-iron girders, which will be found on another page of the present number. It is prepared by a gentleman well known for his acquaintance with the subject.

THE BRIDGE-BUILDING FRATERNITIES IN THE MIDDLE-AGES ON THE CONTINENT.

THE earliest method of passing large streams in ancient Gaul and Germany, was by the means of rafts, or even large bags of skins—as is known from inscriptions and other monuments. For the sake of assisting travellers, and aiding the circulation of merchandise, regular *guilds* of Lenuncularii, Lintrarii, and Utricularii were formed on the Seine, Sambre, Loire, Rhône, Durance, etc.; which, however, degenerated at times to that pitch, that they plundered travellers, and to use the expression of an ancient author, not only assisted in passing rivers, but even conveyed people into the waves of the Styx. Benevolent persons, therefore, decided on erecting at frequented places on the borders of rivers, hostelleries, constructing rafts, and, in fine, on building bridges.* These pious associations were called Pontifices (Pontics), resembling the ancient appellation of a similar kind. But the deserts and the memory of this truly *Christian* association—because there were *no* bridge-builders amongst the *fabri* of the Roman Empire—would have been probably lost, if it had not been preserved by the legend of a French shepherd called *Benezet*, whom the Roman Church reckons amongst their saints. It is, however, not known, whether Benezet was the founder of this society, or merely one of its first members. The wonderful acts which are ascribed to him have been the inducement for recording this association, which still is not sufficiently known. *Benezet*, which signifies the little Benedict, a poor shepherd, born at Hauvilas, in the Vivarais, came (according to narration) in 1177 into the Cathedral of Avignon, at the time when the Archbishop consoled the people about the horror of a solar eclipse. He declared himself called upon by heaven *to build a bridge* over the Rhône—a work then considered impossible, at least stupendous. The Archbishop treated him as a maniac (!), and sent him before the civil authorities, who proposed him, in the way of derision, to *begin* with a stone lying on the banks, such as twenty people could hardly have moved. Benezet *rolled* the stone away; and whatever we may think of the occurrence, still, it is a fact, that in 1185, already a toll was levied on the bridge of Avignon! Although it has been calculated that there was no solar eclipse in the year 1177—but the year following, such inaccuracy of date can hardly militate against the truth of the *leading features* of that legend. It does not detract from Benezet's merit either, that at his times, and even sooner, there existed pious fraternities for the comfort of travellers and pilgrims (Romieux)—which the holy men adapted to the building of bridges for all. Such has been the origin of that splendid monument of the middle ages—the most stupendous bridge in Europe, perhaps in the world. Its length extended to 2,770 feet, and was spread over twenty-one arches, which, however, were constructed in three *different* directions.* There is a charter of 1187, by which Johannes Benedictus, "Prior of the Bridge," obtained for himself and *brothers* a chapel and cemetery, and a chaplain. St. Benezet died in 1184; still in 1185 the bridge building fraternity began the construction of the Bridge of the Holy Ghost (*Pont du St. Esprit*) over the Rhône at Lyons, not finished but in 1305. It is now the largest bridge in Europe, being 2,524 feet long. This bridge also does not keep one straight direction, but has several bends, for adapting itself to locality, depth of water, &c. The bridge of Avignon was finished in 1188, and has always been considered as one of the wonders of France. There, I see it lie—long reaching, and smoothly laid over the Rhône, perceived from afar as you glide down the river. Popular tradition, which often leaves unheeded the so-called great deeds of the great, has faithfully preserved the memory of Benezet, and every peasant will tell you, that it was a shepherd who planned it. The finishing of this stupendous work confirmed the fame of the bridge-building fraternity, which was constituted and chartered in 1189 by Pope Clemens III.

Alike as its foundation is wrapt in obscurity, its shrinking also before the rays of (so-called) modern civilization, is not properly ascertained. How they ceased in Avignon, their head quarters, or whether they merged in some of the subsequent secular guilds, is not known. In other parts of France, as in Bon-Pas on the Durance, where charters of 1270 mention their existence; at Lourmain, between Aix and Apt, &c., their very name suddenly faints away in the noise and bustle of subsequent war and butchery.

As the construction of bridges was considered, in the middle ages, amongst the *works* of Christian *piety*,†—Italy, Spain, Sweden, and Denmark, possess several bridges which own the same origin, although it is not yet ascertained whether regular fraternities existed for that purpose. Still the Swedish chronicles mention one Benedict between 1178 and 1191, as a bishop and bridge-builder at *Skara*, who, a contemporary of Benezet, might have become illuminated from the same source. As the Templars of Spain had the duty of aiding the passing of pilgrims to Jerusalem, the old Roman road in Lower Navarra received the name of the Templar's Road. With such and similar pursuits, it cannot be wondered that the property of the bridge-building fraternity was, in many instances, surrendered to the order of St. John of Jerusalem (*frères hospitaliers*) and thus merged into it. The traces of analogous fraternities in Germany (England?) have not yet been properly examined. To its examination in France, *two* great names have chiefly contributed, *Gregoire*† and *Millin*. It was an ancient inscription near Mirabeau, on the Durance, found in the chapel near the place where the raft ordinarily starts from, which gave rise to the whole inquiry. It may be interesting for our readers to know, that the habit of the Knights of the Hospital of *St. Jacques-du-haut-pas*, at Paris (most probably an analogous fraternity in those times), exhibits, as shewn in their sepulchral monuments, a *pick* on their breast—while that of the Holy Ghost fraternity of Montpelliers consists of two road bridge-arches and a cross. [From German sources]. J. L.

* It is strange to observe, that most of the actual *speculations* of our times were objects of philanthropy in the middle ages. So, moreover, the business of pawnbroker, whence the Italian and French names *Monte de Pietà*, *Mont de Piété*—*mount of piety*.

* Details and drawings of this stupendous construction are to be found in *Gauthey* "Traité de Construction des Ponts; whence they have been copied into *Wiebeking's* "Art of Water-building."

† Morini Sacram. Pœnitentiæ. Paris, 1666. p. 758.

† Recherches historiques sur les freres pontifes. Paris, 1810, 8vo.

NEW CHURCH AT WILTON, NEAR SALISBURY.

THE new church at Wilton, dedicated to St. Mary and St. Nicholas, was consecrated on the 9th inst.

IT is of Byzantine architecture, coeval with the Norman of this country, viz. of the eleventh century. It is 120 feet long, 50 wide, and 57 feet high internally, and is entirely faced with freestone, the inner portion of the walls being of brick. It stands upon a platform running all round the church, and is approached in front by a flight of six steps of Portland stone, the lowest step being about 100 feet in length. The plan consists of a central porch, a nave, side porches and aisles, chancel, chancel aisles, and three apsides, with a vestry and a bell campanile connected with the church merely by an open cloister, which is very richly ornamented, and consists of double columns on each side, standing on a basement or plinth. The building as a whole, externally, presents an imposing aspect, standing, as it does, isolated in the midst of an extensive area, and the general effect is unimpaired by the contiguity of other and incongruous buildings. The church stands well back from the street, from which it is divided, close to the footway, by a low wall, surmounted by handsome iron railings. The elevation on this side has three rich door-ways, in recessed arches, the principal one being elaborately carved with six columns. In the centre are a series of small windows, lighting a passage

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